

September 25, 2020

To: All Staff at Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Cc: Great Smoky Mountains National Park Management Team

**Re: An open letter to the staff at Great Smoky Mountains National Park in response to the recent racist vandalism of the Foothills Parkway Entrance sign**

Dear National Park Service staff,

The organizations signed on to this letter stand in solidarity with the staff, family, community, businesses, and visitors of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. We were deeply saddened to learn of the recent racist act of intimidation that occurred when a black bear skin with head attached was draped over the entrance sign to Foothills Parkway accompanied by a hateful sign that read, “From here to the Lake, Black lives don’t matter.”<sup>1</sup> We oppose and condemn this repugnant act. We stand with those affected by this act, including Black staff, their families, local communities, and visitors.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park is a treasure that belongs to all of us. This park represents the beating heart of the economy of our region. The Park contributed 1.2 billion dollars of economic activity and creates nearly 14,000 jobs. It is the most visited national park in our nation. Beyond its enormous economic benefit, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and our public lands system in general, are places of healing, health, rejuvenation, wonder, learning, science, and reflection.<sup>2</sup> This attempt to intimidate others based on race does not speak for our community. We believe that Black Lives Matter, that our national parks belong to all of us regardless of race or difference, and that the benefit, joy, and healing spaces represented in our national parks and public lands must be equally available to all. At the same time, we recognize that this repugnant act is only one of the many ways in which systemic racism affects the experience of Black, Indigenous, and people of color on our public lands.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lilly Knoepp, *Great Smoky Mountain National Park Seeks Vandals*, BLUE RIDGE PUBLIC RADIO (Sep. 22, 2020), <https://www.bpr.org/post/great-smoky-mountains-national-park-seeks-vandals#stream/0>.

<sup>2</sup> SMOKIES HIKES FOR HEALING, <https://www.smokieshikesforhealing.org> (last visited Sep. 24, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Latria Graham, *Out There, Nobody Can Hear You Scream*, OUTSIDE MAG. (Sep. 21, 2020), <https://www.outsideonline.com/2416929/out-there-nobody-can-hear-you->

To each of you who act in public service as members of the National Park Service, we stand with and by you as you seek to respond to this racist and hurtful act. We look forward to working with you to ensure that our public lands are welcoming refuges for all people, including Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

Respectfully,

Adventures Accessed, LLC  
American Canoe Association, Tennessee Chapter  
American Conservation Experience  
Appalachian Trail Conservancy  
Appalachian Voices  
Asheville GreenWorks  
Blue Ridge Audubon  
Blue Ridge Outdoors Magazine  
Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation  
Bryant Research, LLC  
Carolina Jews for Justice/West  
Carolina Mountain Club  
Chota Canoe Club  
Conservation Council for Hawaii  
Defenders of Wildlife, Southeast Program  
Discover Life in America  
Dogwood Alliance  
Don Barger-Retired NPCA Southeast Regional Director  
Forest Keepers  
Friends of Great Smoky Mountains National Park  
Friends of the Smokies  
Gatlinburg Chamber of Commerce  
Gatlinburg Convention and Visitors Bureau  
Gatlinburg Convention Center  
Great Smoky Mountains Association  
Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont  
Harpeth Conservancy  
Knoxville Area Urban League

Knoxville Branch of the Tennessee Chapter, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People  
Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative Commission  
MountainTrue  
National Parks Conservation Association  
National Wildlife Federation, Eastern Division  
North Carolina Wildlife Federation  
Public Lands Alliance  
Rotary Club of Gatlinburg  
Sierra Club, North Carolina Chapter  
Sierra Club, Tennessee Chapter  
Smoky Mountains Hiking Club  
Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy  
Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards  
Southern Environmental Law Center  
Swain County Tourism Development Authority  
Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning  
Tennessee Conservation Voters  
Tennessee Environmental Council  
Tennessee Ornithological Society  
Tennessee Valley Canoe Club  
Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church  
Tennessee Wildlife Federation  
The Coalition to Protect America's National Parks  
The Wilderness Society  
Wildlands Network